

"YOUNG ARTISTS IN ISRAEL: Looking through the Social Prism": ZOYA CHERKASSY-NNADI



(fc: IMJ)

The last artist I present in this essay also deals with the way history shapes identity, but she turns to her own history, and her medium is entirely different. Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi (b. 1976) has already surprisingly undergone quite a few dramatic artistic phases, in various media, and she has dealt with various topics, such as Jewish identity and Jewish visual culture, and problems of the art world, to name two of the topics.

In her current phase, in the past few years, she has been painting on big canvases, representing memories of her childhood in Ukraine, in the times of the Soviet Union, and of the immigration to Israel, that also took place in her childhood. She captures moments and scenes from what seems to be not only her own memory, but a collective memory of the enormous community of over one million immigrants, who came to Israel in the 1990's, after the fall of the Soviet Union. Her paintings are colorful, almost naïve, but the rough brush strokes create biting pictures, blunt, straight to the point, and painful.

The Israel Museum holds the Diptych 1991 in Ukraine, Friday in the Projects (2015), which includes two large canvases, depicting wretched life conditions, in the surroundings of tenement houses, where poverty and violence prevail. The artist took pains to show us in detail, in her straightforward style, locations of trauma. In the right canvas, in a deranged winter urban landscape, political tension in Ukraine is shown by a clashing demonstration in the back, while in the front, we witness violence, sexual violence and drunkenness. An environment, where the two girls seen at the bottom right of the picture, are far from being safe. The left side appears to be almost a mirror image. Here, the yellow color dominates, and not the white, indicating that we are looking at a scene taking place in one of the developmental towns situated in the Negev, the southern desert in Israel.

Nevertheless, the gloomy conditions are similar. A stabbing takes place as someone is shooting out of a black car, a man is searching for something in the large garbage container, and a drug addict standing in the entrance of a building is injecting himself. All this is happening as a missile is flying over the buildings, reminding us of the general political conflict in the area (historically, the Negev was not threatened much by missiles in the 90's, but later). In the two images, of Ukraine and of Israel, the artist created concentrated capsules of miserable living conditions. The comparison made by their proximity, is painful, not only because we are confronted with horrible life circumstances, but also because it implies that immigrating to Israel was not necessarily an improvement in the immigrants' life. Only a camel and a Bedouin, standing in the background by two palm trees, are a delicate sign of long-ago images of the Promised Land.

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Discussing the art works created by Nevet Yitzhak, Tamir Zadok, Dor Guez and Zoya Cherkassky- Nnadi, shows how art in Israel today, is infused and charged by the tensions existing in Israeli society. In the early years, this society was perceived as a melting pot, out of which a new Israeli identity would emerge. Since then, the rise of the politics of identities has shown this idea Naïve and at the same time even destructive. Art, with its wonderful ability to contain and express complicated human situations, is a powerful tool to understand the social psyche, and to do so with compassion.

(text: Noa Milikowsky-Marienburg)